

M. Du Chaillu and his Book.

The following letter, from Mr. R. B. Walker, of the Gaboon, appeared in the 'Morning Advertiser' of Sept. 16. It was written for and sent to 'The Times,' but not inserted:—

" Gaboon, West Africa, July 22, 1861.

" M. Du Chaillu, in his letter which appeared in 'The Times' of May 22, in reply to what he somewhat contemptuously terms the 'cavils' of Dr. Gray, having ventured to refer that gentleman to his (M. Du Chaillu's) friends in Corisco and Gaboon, and to the missionaries and traders in general, it appears to me that to remain silent after such a challenge would be an unpardonable act of complicity on their part. Therefore, as a trader in this river and the neighbourhood of ten years' standing, I take up the gauntlet he has so recklessly thrown down. I trust to your impartiality to give insertion to this letter, in which I will point out a few only of the most glaring and gross of his numerous false statements and exaggerations which have struck me on a careful perusal of his so-called 'Explorations in Equatorial Africa,'—which work is neither more nor less than an amusing fiction,—in which the author, knowing the improbability of finding speedy contradiction in England, has given full scope to his apparently very fertile imagination. Were this work to be allowed to pass undisputed, not only might the confiding public in general, but the scientific world in particular, suffer by too readily accepting as *bond fide* the 'traveller's tales' with which it is replete.

" Having known M. Du Chaillu for some years personally, and possessing, moreover, from reliable sources, information the most exact as to his antecedents, besides having a knowledge of many of the places and people which he pretends to describe, I am induced to request a place in your journal for the following remarks.

" M. Du Chaillu has stated that he found piles of human bones in the F'an (properly F'an, *pl.* Ba F'an) towns which he visited. I do not pretend to have been in the particular towns or villages which he mentions, and which probably have no other existence than in his own imagination; but I have twice visited the Ba F'an country, living in one of their towns for four days at a time, besides making shorter stays in some eight or ten others, one of which, situated about 120 miles from the mouth of this river, contains about 3000 inhabitants, and I never saw the slightest vestige of human remains in any of them; nor did either of the two Europeans, or the numerous natives of Gaboon and Kroomen, by whom I was accompanied, although we looked for them. I have made inquiries of all white people, whether missionaries, French officers, or traders, who have made excursions into any part of the country inhabited by the Ba F'an, but not one of them (with the single exception of an American missionary, who has been in communication with that people for many years, and speaks their language) ever saw a human bone or other remains; and the gentleman in question only came across a single skull planted in the ground in one village,—an object to be met with elsewhere in Africa than in the towns of the cannibal Ba F'an. That

these people are notorious anthropophagi, no one attempts to deny ; but the ' piles of human ribs, legs, hand-arm bones, and skulls,' are inventions of M. Du Chaillu.

" Again, the statement of the untameability of the young of the Gorilla, or N'Jina, is untrue. In proof whereof, let me ask M. Du Chaillu, whose memory, usually so very good, seems to have failed him signally in this particular instance, if he has forgotten the young female Gorilla, of from two to three years of age, called Seraphine, which lived at my factory for four months in 1859, and which he repeatedly saw there? I assert, without fear of contradiction by M. Du Chaillu or any other person (and I could name scores of Europeans who saw it), that this animal was perfectly tame, docile, and tractable—far more so, indeed, than many negro children of the same age. Not only was she on perfectly good terms with all grown-up people in and about the factory, but was exceedingly attached to her keeper Curtis, whom she could not bear to be out of her sight, but regularly accompanied him about the factory and in his walks in the town and neighbourhood. She was familiar and quiet with myself and clerks, and was only displeased when children approached her ; and for these she seemed to have, in common with most large apes and monkeys, a very great dislike. She was seldom tied up, and even then only by a very small cord, which she could easily have broken, or cut with her teeth, had she felt so inclined. She allowed herself to be clothed, seeming to like it ; and actually went to breakfast with a friend of mine, M. Barbotin, commandant de l'avisé à vapeur, le Rénaudin, upon which occasion she conducted herself to the admiration of everybody. When at times put on the table, or amongst vessels of glass or earthenware, she was most careful not to break anything. She finally died from dysentery and chagrin,—the latter caused by her keeper being prevented by his other occupations from paying her so much attention as she had been in the habit of receiving.

" M. Du Chaillu ignores totally the presence of M. Duval, who accompanied him in his trip overland to Cape Lopez, and likewise omits all mention of an American trader living close to him on the Fernan Vas, to whom he was under many obligations.

" The species of Ant to which he gives the name of '*Barhekouay*' (a word unknown in Mipongwe, and probably invented by himself) is the insect commonly known as the ' driver,' of which there are two kinds, called here respectively *Ntyounou* and *Ntyounou sakoa*. I need scarcely say that his description is a gross exaggeration ; the insect, although sufficiently troublesome, being by no means so formidable as he represents it.

" In the Appendix to his work, M. Du Chaillu mentions a visit paid by him to a French emigrant ship at Cape Lopez : no ship of the kind ever shipped a single emigrant there, or even called there. The vessel to which he alludes was the '*Phoenix*,' Capt. Chevalier, on board of which he accompanied me ; and it was through me that he obtained permission to go, when he heard of my intention. So far from his being there able to hold intercourse with the people on board,

as his boasted knowledge of the different native languages should have enabled him to do, he could hardly speak half-a-dozen words correctly, and was glad to avail himself of the services of Curtis, then interpreter to Capt. Chevalier, who furnished him with the numerals of the Kioo and other tribes to the north-west which figure in his Appendix; and I was the medium of communication with those emigrants speaking the Mipongwe. As to M. Du Chaillu's qualifications in this latter language, they are of the most infinitesimal kind, as I can assert with confidence, having a competent knowledge of it myself; and he abundantly proves his ignorance when employing any Mipongwe words, nearly all of which are wrong. His Mipongwe numerals are totally incorrect. He has even less knowledge of the dialects of the neighbouring tribes. As to his identification of individuals of thirty-eight different tribes on board the 'Phoenix,' nothing of the kind occurred; and his information must have been obtained from Capt. Chevalier, or the French *délégué*.

"In his engraving, the horns of '*Niare*' are simply *à l'impossible*: this animal is certainly the 'bush cow' of Dr. Gray, the native name for the animal (*Nyare-iga*) having literally that signification.

"Dr. Gray is also correct in his surmise that the specimens were not prepared on the spot. I saw many of them in the 'rough;' they were prepared in New York,—the operator finding them in such a bad state as to cause him to say that he would not undertake the task again for 100 dollars per specimen.

"With regard to the engravings which M. Du Chaillu alleges to have been prepared, with a few exceptions, from his own sketches, how does it happen that he had no sketches before leaving here; and actually told me that he could not sketch?

"I think I have sufficiently shown that M. Du Chaillu has been guilty of many incorrect statements; in fact, his work contains nearly as many errors and inaccuracies as there are paragraphs. It is, moreover, teeming with vanity; and, taking it as a whole, it is hard to say whether the author, in his attempt to impose upon, and, in fact, humbug the scientific world, displays most mendacity or ignorance. I will proceed, with many apologies for so far trespassing on your space, to give an instance of downright untruthfulness which occurs in the concluding paragraphs of the book. M. Du Chaillu there states that, after languishing for four months at Camma, waiting for a ship, his sight was at length gladdened by the appearance of a vessel which came to an anchor off the mouth of the Fernan Vas, being sent by his friends in Gaboon, the captain having orders to ascertain how he came by his death. Now, not only had his death never been reported,—and if it had, he was far too insignificant for any one to send a vessel to inquire into the manner of it,—but he had actually only left Gaboon some fifteen or twenty days previously, after having made arrangements with the very same captain to follow him to ship his ebony, &c. for America; and the four months were actually spent in Gaboon and the neighbourhood, two of them with a member of the American mission, who proceeds to England by this same mail *en route* to America, and who can

confirm my statement. This gentleman may be heard of by application at the American Consulate at Liverpool.

"I, in common with most persons, doubt that M. Du Chaillu ever killed or assisted to kill a Gorilla, and also of the extent of his 'travels.' At any rate, his estimate of distances, as well as the direction in which he pretends to have penetrated, must be received with the utmost caution, as not only was he unprovided with instruments, but ignorant of their use.

"As endorsing my opinions, I am authorized to mention the name of M. Labeguerie, a French merchant here, and a distinguished member of the Agricultural Committee; to which I venture to add that of my friend M. A. Michon, of Havre, who could furnish information on the subject of his 'travels,' &c.

"With regard to his commercial exploits, which are as mythic as his sporting adventures, I beg to suggest that application be made to the firm of Oppenheim and Co., of Paris, with which firm he had some dealings in the year 1852, and who will be able to give every desirable *renseignement*, not only on that point, but on others also which I will not mention, when informed that M. Paul Du Chaillu, the Great African explorer (?) and the lion of the season in London, is identical with M. Paul Belloni.

"Having thus, as far as time will permit, done my best to arrest a career which I leave others to characterize,
 "I am, &c.,
 'To the Editor of *The Times*.'"
 "R. B. WALKER."

On the Height of the Gorilla.

By Dr. J. E. GRAY, F.R.S., V.P.Z.S. &c.

Much difference occurs in the statements of travellers and others with reference to the height of the great African Ape. Bowdich, the first traveller by whom it was referred to, under the name of the *Ingēna*, states it, on the authority of the natives of the Gaboon, to be generally five feet high; but in some recent notices it has been asserted to reach a height of six feet two inches; and the specimen exhibited at the Meeting of German Naturalists at Vienna is said, on good authority, to have measured more than six feet in height.

The measurement of a stuffed skin without bones is necessarily delusive, depending as it does, first, on the mode in which the skin has been originally prepared, and, secondly, on the extent to which the artist may be disposed to stretch it. Such measurements are not to be relied on, unless they are in accordance with those of the bony skeleton; and it has therefore occurred to me that it would be desirable to measure the long bones of the limbs of the various skeletons existing in the British Museum,—the osseous structure giving the only certain dimensions on which reliance can be placed.

The skeletons in the British Museum are six in number, viz. :—

1. A skeleton obtained from Paris by Professor Owen in 1857, and mounted in the best French manner.
2. 3. 4. Skeletons of male and female and young male, all more or less imperfect. Purchased from M. Du Chaillu, 1861.
5. A skeleton of a male, obtained at Bristol in 1858, of which we have also the stuffed skin.